

## HART ROCKCAFÉ

Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: Apr 1, 2017, 11.45 PM IST

**By: Priyadarshini Nandy**

*American songwriter-musician-singer Beth Hart performs in the city this month. For some music lovers, it's like receiving a telegram straight from the gods of music*

There's a chance that Euterpe, one of the nine muses from Greek mythology, the patron of music and lyric poetry, would be sitting among the audiences, appropriately disguised of course, later this month in Bengaluru. After all, even a goddess cannot afford miss a Beth Hart concert.



The American singer, songwriter and musician, is a sensation, for the lack of a better word, and her concerts aren't what one would call 'deliberate'. She gets on stage, goes into somewhat of a trance as the show progresses, and mesmerises the daylights out of you with her piano and voice. And Am I the One (1996), Blame the Moon (1996), If I Tell You I Love You (2013), and Jazz Man (2016) are only a miniscule number of songs that she's done magic with. And that magic can be traced back to around 1976, when she was four years old, and chose to write and perform her own song at a school piano recital.

If you're not familiar with Hart's music, she's primarily a contemporary blues musician, and even performs to soul, and jazz fusion. We would also not be surprised if she decides to dabble with heavy metal; her voice has enough and more power for that.

Performing across two venues this month, as part of the Total Environment Music Foundation, Hart talks about her life as a musician, and what it's taught her so far.

### **Excerpts from the interview:**

**You have often spoken about your father, and your relationship or the lack of it, with him. Do you think your music would be the way it is today, had it not been the unanswered questions, the angst, or even the pain from that?**

I believe, for any kind of artist, everything you have experienced through the course of your life will manifest in your work. So, if it weren't for my

experiences growing up, my music wouldn't be what it is today. Yes, there is still angst that I need to deal with, along with my bipolar disorder, which doesn't make it easier. I take necessary medication, practise meditation and yoga, go swimming and ensure that I remain completely sober. Still, I do have bad days be it mania or depression. I tend to be more creative during this time but it is also a dangerous time for me as I have a history of hurting myself in different ways. However, for me it's an ongoing journey of acceptance, and choosing to grow and let go of whatever it is.

**A few of your songs reflect some of that old torment, but do you find yourself at a better place today?**

See, that's the thing, I don't know why people sometimes just assume that life is like a movie with a beginning, and difficult scenario and a fairytale ending. Life is not a movie. I still deal with difficulties today like I have in the past and wonderful moments today like I have faced in the past. From the way I see it, it's a never-ending rollercoaster ride, sometimes it's fun and other times its brutal.

**In an older interview, you had thanked the drugs. Had you not gone down that road, do you think life would have been different?**

Everything I've experienced has shaped me not just as an artist, but also as a human being, and gave me my relationships with my family, my friends and my husband. With regard to the drugs, I don't believe that they had any impact on my song writing. All they did was hurt me. But they also broke me out of the cycle of always choosing to be with the wrong people – people who were bad for me. At the height of my addiction, I couldn't work; I couldn't do anything. It was at this point that my husband, Scott (Guetzkow) came into my life. He became my support system, my lifesaver. He helped me break out of my cycle of choosing the wrong people and has been unbelievable every step of the way since then. So yes, had I not gone that road I would have never have Scott in my life.

**Tell us about working with Jeff Beck. How did it feel performing with him? You'd also wanted to play with Leonard Cohen.**

Jeff Beck is an absolute genius. When I went in for our first writing session together I didn't even know who he was. Looking back, I'm glad I didn't because I would have gotten extremely nervous and intimidated. I've never met anyone who can play the guitar like that. Later when he asked me to come out the road with him it was phenomenal. Post my set, I would sit on the side of the stage and watch this genius perform up close. There has never been and never will be a musician like Jeff Beck.

About Leonard Cohen, his voice is haunting and gorgeous and so sensual. He has such a male tone but he could speak about these incredibly sensitive vulnerable issues beautifully. That's one of the things I love about this art, how two complete opposites work together, the kind of magic it creates is so great.

**You've credited Michael Stevens with tapping the writer in you. Do you tell better stories today than you did, say 10 years ago?**

I think I've always had the ability to tap into my vulnerability as a writer. Like you mentioned earlier about me being able to talk about things most people wouldn't be willing to share. Due to my condition, I've gotten used to talking to my doctor and others about my feelings since I was a child. That's how I've continued to be, no matter what people may think or how bad it might make me look. What Michael did was challenge me to channel the hope and happiness inside of me and write from that place. He made me realise that I never usually write or paint when I'm feeling joyful, blessed, excited, alive and passionate. He wanted me to change that and tap into my happiness for inspiration. It was a scary and challenging journey but I'm glad it did it.

**You've performed some excellent covers – what are some of your favourites?**

Your Heart is as Black as Night is one. Melody Gardot wrote that song by the way, and she is a fabulous singer. There are so many unbelievable songs out there, but for me when I cover a song, I need to have a connection with it on a personal level. And I think the audience knows that. They want a person to talk to them, to relate to them. That's what I go to when I do covers with Joe Bonamassa because he understood, and was supportive of it. The song 'I'd Rather go Blind (originally by Etta James, 1968) is about my father and how I felt when he left. That pain of abandonment and the fear I felt affect me even today. So, with that song, I draw from those emotions.

**Do you have any regrets at all?**

This is a tricky question for me. I've heard people say, "I have no regrets, because everything I have experienced has brought me to where I am". But I would be lying if I didn't say that there are times I think of the things I've said or done that hurt other people or myself and I cringe. So you could say that would be a regret. On the other hand, we are all on a journey and have our own strengths and weaknesses to deal with and that's another way I like to look at it. What if something I considered a weakness was really a strength? But I guess my regrets also depend on what day and what mood I'm in to a certain extent. Which is why I really don't know how to answer that question to be honest. It's not just one thing or the other to me.

**You've battled with your inner demons for a while, and you've found exceptional support from Scott. Are those demons calmer today?**

Yes, I have unbelievable support. I have come to accept that the demons are something that tried to trick me to believing I was them when I was younger. I still have those days but with support from Scott I now focus on connecting with God, not just through music but also through meditation and going to church. I also work on turning a negative situation around by saying the opposite of how I feel at the time. For example, when I feel uncomfortable and don't like any of the people around me, I say 'I love these people, and I feel great', as ridiculous as it sounds, it makes a difference. It's like rewiring my brain.